

**Abstract of the Disclosure**

A character region detecting unit detects  
respective character regions in a plurality of  
5 document images which are partitioned and read. A  
character recognizing unit recognizes the characters  
within the detected character regions, and converts  
them into character codes. An overlapping position  
detecting unit detects the positions of line images  
10 whose matching degrees are high as an overlapping  
position by making a comparison between the positions  
and the sizes of the character regions in the two  
document images. An image merging unit merges the two  
document images at the detected overlapping position.

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